

it's waiting there for you by littlearrows

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Characters: Carol (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Tommy H. (Stranger Things), Will Byers

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Summary:

Five times Steve gets caught and one time he comes out on his own

it's waiting there for you

Author's Note:

Warning for use of the q-slur throughout

Title from Africa by Toto

hardly proofread and edited; probably some historical inaccuracies; sorry

1.

Tommy and Steve hook up sometimes, when Steve's parents are out of town and he's sick of being alone in an empty house or when Tommy gets in a fight with Carol and he knows he's in the wrong.

They're fourteen when they start, making out by Steve's heated pool one November afternoon while his parents were golfing in California. They've always lived in each other's pockets, snuck into each other's bedrooms late at night, but after that first time it gets bigger, more secret. It's stupid and codependent, wrong in more ways than Steve can count, but it still feels good, and it's easy with Tommy.

They don't talk about it, not before or during or after, instead just trading cigarettes and occasionally joints back and forth to each other as they get redressed before going to watch TV or drive around.

They're at Tommy's one weekend. He and Carol had a huge fight about Tommy pushing her into the pool at Henry Mackelson's party. Tommy's parents are in Florida for their anniversary so Steve is staying the night. It's late by now, the moon far overhead and the owl outside Tommy's bedroom hooting annoyingly.

Tommy is laying back on the edge of the bed while Steve has him in his mouth; the owl's hooting throwing him off his rhythm. By now he knows exactly how Tommy likes it, and he's getting really close, Steve can tell.

Suddenly, the door swings open, clattering against Tommy's dresser and sending one of his trophies tumbling to the floor.

“Jesus!” Steve cried as he pulls out and turns away from the door, fumbling with his jeans to button them back up as Tommy stands up hurriedly and scrabbles to find his boxers that Steve had thrown somewhere.

Steve looks back as Tommy grabs his underwear, and Carol is standing in the doorway. She’s holding the spare set of keys Tommy’s family keeps under the doormat. She turns quickly to leave. Tommy runs after her, clumsily stepping into his boxers as he shouts after her. “Carol!” Steve can hear him say as he goes down the stairs to chase her. “Jesus Carol, it’s not what it looks like!”

Steve grabs his jacket and shimmies out of Tommy’s window onto the landing before jumping to the ground, landing with a thud. He hears Tommy and Carol talking quietly on the porch as Steve walks back home.

The rest of the weekend is spent getting high in his basement and wondering if he can convince his parents to put him in private school by Monday. He’s dreading it, driving as slow as he can the entire way. For Christ’s sake, he actually stops at all the stop signs instead of rolling through them and skips morning basketball practice.

He can’t imagine a universe where Carol actually kept quiet about him blowing Tommy and as he walks into first period, he’s waiting to be called a queer. He expects piles of notes on his desk or his locker to spray painted or something equally humiliating.

But there’s nothing—no notes, no spray paint. He goes through the day waiting for a punch, but the blow never comes. The same girls flirt with him and the same sophomores hero worship him and by the time he gets to lunch, Tommy and Carol are sitting in the usual spot waving him over.

Before he can even sit down Carol is asking him, “Are you going to Lauren’s birthday party this weekend? She says she can get some tequila and limes.”

Steve shrugs, eyes darting between Carol and Tommy. Waiting. For what, he’s not sure.

“Oh c’mon Stevie,” Tommy says and punches his shoulder. Steve feels the spot where Tommy touched burning and jerks away before Tommy can do it again. He looks at Carol, who isn’t even watching them. “Everyone knows you’re a sucker for tequila. Tequila Steve is fun Steve!” Carol laughs at that and puts her head on Tommy’s shoulder.

Okay fine. They’re ignoring it. Maybe Tommy convinced her that it actually *wasn’t* what it looked like.

He smiles, laughs. “Yeah, yeah,” He says. “Of course I’m going. I think I can break my ten-shot record too.”

They never talk about it. Tommy never kisses Steve again.

2.

Jonathan hates Steve.

It’s easy to hate *King Steve*, especially since it feels like he’s all anyone ever talks about. Jonathan is sitting in photography class and the teacher won’t stop talking about last night’s basketball game. “Harrington gave us a three point lead when it really mattered,” he says when he’s supposed to be teaching shutter speed. Two girls at lunch swap stories with a disgusting amount of detail about hooking up with him. Steve breaks his own keg stand record—43 seconds—and Jonathan hears about for a month.

It doesn’t help that Steve is currently circling Nancy Wheeler like a shark. Jonathan’s known Nancy since second grade when Will and Mike became friends, and he’s had a crush on her since about three minutes after they met. Jonathan has a stupid fantasy about dating Nancy, being her first boyfriend. But it looks like Steve is going to take that title from Jonathan and Jonathan is getting increasingly upset about it.

He’s shooting the girls’ soccer practice for the yearbook one afternoon. It’s good. It’s a good distraction from the way his insides twist up when he thinks about Steve and Nancy together. She and Barb sat with him, Carol and Tommy H. at today at lunch, which is such *bullshit* since she usually spends lunch studying in the library.

He stops that train of thought fast as Hanna B. scores a goal. He feels good about this roll of film and thinks about all the action shots he'll get to add to his NYU portfolio after they develop.

His mood sours when he sees Steve by the gym talking to someone on the basketball team, ruining all his shots by being in the background. There's no way that Steve is going into his portfolio, and Jonathan really doesn't want him in the yearbook any more than he already will be. He packs up all his camera equipment and leaves school for the day.

He sits on the roll of film for a week before the yearbook advisor demands that he develop the pictures and turn them in. Jonathan is standing in the dark room, getting increasingly pissed about all the ruined pictures. He knows that he should be happy about the pictures since they show good composure, but he's just watching all the ways that Steve is ruining them.

Three pictures develop together and Jonathan watches as Steve in the background gets closer to the other boy in the photo. The last picture comes together and Steve and the other boy are kissing.

Jonathan nearly drops dead. He twists the picture around, trying to find a way that he's misinterpreting things. There's no fucking way that Steve is queer, so obviously Jonathan must be misinterpreting things. But no, there he is, stepping closer to the other boy and kissing him. The other boy has his hand in Steve's hair.

Jonathan should tell. It would serve Steve right, since him and his friends have been such bullies for years now. He wonders, briefly, if he can get copies of the pictures made and put up by the time school gets outs today.

But then he thinks of Will. Everyone calls him queer; he gets bullied mercilessly for it. Honestly, sometimes, when Dad was talking about girls or when Jonathan points out a pretty girl on TV and Will's eyes glaze over as if he doesn't even see them Jonathan does wonder.

He thinks about a few years from now, if Will told him that he liked boys, how different that conversation would go if Jonathan had outed Steve Harrington to the entire school. Would Will ever tell him?

What would his mom say when she found out?

In the end, he rips up the picture.

A month later, when everything goes to shit and Steve Harrington has his back while wielding a spiked baseball ball at an eight foot monster that's trying to eat them, Jonathan is pretty happy he got rid of the picture.

(Steve comes out to him seven years later while the two hotbox in Jonathan's car. Jonathan laughs and says, "Yeah no kidding, dude" before turning up the Bowie album they're listening to and handing the joint back to Steve.)

3.

Steve is different, afterwards. Nancy is different too, but Steve is more noticeably different. He's jumpy now, fingers always twitching and feet automatically shifting towards the truck where he keeps his bat after every little noise. He smokes a lot more and ditches class even more than he used to. He does perimeter checks around his house at night, two if he's home alone. He thinks Nancy doesn't know that part, but she does.

He's home alone a lot. His parents are always away on exotic vacations or maintaining their company's branches or visiting family on the east coast. Steve can't go because of school, or at least that's their excuse. But they also don't take him anywhere in the summer or during Christmas break so she thinks it's a pretty stupid excuse.

She stays at his house a lot. She feels a little bad lying to her parents—"Stacey really needs help studying for our biology test so could I stay at her house tonight?"—but what they don't know won't hurt them. Mike, the little shit eater, always gives her a knowing smile as she leaves. She sometimes gives him quarters for the arcade as a bribe to stay quiet.

It's summer break, eight months since the Upside Down took Will, and she's spending the day in Steve's pool. Jonathan, Will and Mike came over for a little while before Jonathan drove them to the arcade and went back home so it's just Steve and Nancy now. Steve is inside

cooking dinner, and he calls for her.

She drips all over the tile as she comes inside. He drapes a towel over her shoulders and kisses her forehead before asking her, “Are you staying tonight, or going home?”

“I can stay.”

He hums happily. It’s nice seeing him like this—relaxed and content. He’s on edge so often these days, muscles clamping up and breaths getting short. It’s worse when his parents are home, him having to keep up that façade of easygoing basketball star, not a care in the world. She’s happy they can relax together on this sleepy, easy summer day.

He asks her to grab a movie from his room as he cooks so they can watch it as they eat together. She races upstairs, dripping water onto the carpet.

She decides to change as she’s looking. Steve’s put on Toto downstairs and she can hear Africa starting. She dances around his room as she wiggles into her skirt and looks for her shirt.

She thinks she sees it peeking out from under the bed and *honestly* he needs to be more careful about where he throws her clothes in his haste to take them off, but part of her still finds it endearing how eager he is. She grabs the shirt and with it comes out an issue of *Playgirl*.

She looks at the cover for a long time, Africa humming along in the background. She can hear Steve shout-singing, “It’s gonna take a lot to drag me away from you!”

There’s a page of the magazine dog eared and she flips to it. Lyle Waggoner is there, in a little swimsuit. She flips the page and he’s sitting in the chair, with no clothes on. She shuts the magazine quickly.

She hears him coming up the stairs and shoves the magazine back under the bed quickly. She just finishes tugging her shirt on when he opens the door and kisses her. He holds the side of her face gently,

and for one second it feels so good she forgets about what she just saw. Then it comes back to her and she pulls away.

He smiles at her. "Dinner's ready," he says. "Did you find the movie?"

She stands on her tip toes and kisses his temple. "No sorry, I couldn't find it."

He laughs and spots it instantly on his nightstand. They go downstairs and eat while they watch it.

They end up having sex that night, and she looks for signs she might have missed. But there aren't any. He's just as eager as always and goes down on her forever, making her come one, two, three times before she pushes him away. He sighs happily and flops down next to her afterwards. "I love that, Nance," he says.

She smiles at him. Maybe someday she'll ask, but she doesn't want to ruin their great day together.

4.

With Jane at home, it's hard for Hopper to keep doing these late-night patrols. But Officer Jones is out sick this whole week, and Hopper is covering for him. Jane was pretty happy and tried to be secretive about it. Late nights for Hopper meant extra whipped cream on waffles and romance movies for Jane. He's trying to be cool about it, loosen the reins, even though it feels impossible. By this time next year, she'll be out in the world, and he'll have to get more relaxed about her having some independence. He has heart palpitations thinking about it.

A call comes in from Loch Nora. Some teenagers in a car and *can you please send someone over to stop them?* Hop rolls his eyes, remembering his days in a parked car as a teenager and thinking that rich people are too nosey for their own good.

But still, the call came in, and he's the only one patrolling in the area so he lets them know he's on his way.

He can spot the car instantly, even though they tried to be sneaky. The street is dark and the trees are overgrown, hanging down over

the street to give them some cover. They're still so obvious. God. Teenagers are so stupid.

Hopper groans, thinking about how he has a teenager at home. If Jane and Mike ever parked somewhere, Hop would move her across the country.

He gets out and knocks on the steamed over windows with his flashlights. He hears a boy say, “Shit!” before Hopper flashes the light into the car.

It's Steve Harrington, which he probably should have guessed since it is Loch Nora and he *does* know the kid's reputation. He knows Steve and Nancy Wheeler broke up about a month ago, before the demo-dogs and Jane closing the gate and all the shit that's happened. Hopper wants to shoot his own foot for knowing so much about a bunch of teenagers' love lives.

Steve has his shirt off and is on top of the Daniel Talbot, the lacrosse star who graduated two years ago. Hopper thinks *fuck* before Steve rolls the window down.

“Hey Hopper,” he says, as if he can be casual about all this. His face is still all messed up from Billy's beating, his bruises a sickly green-yellow and the stitches on his head and jaw looking nasty. “What's going on?”

Hop ignore the question, and Steve pulls his shirt on. Daniel is saying *shit shit shit shit* under his breath as Hopper shines the light on his face. “This your car, kid?”

Daniel nods, and then says, “Yes sir. This is my car, sir. Do you, uh, need to see my license, sir?” Steve rolls his eyes, which Hop pretends not to see. He feels bad for Daniel. He knows this is the worst fucking situation these two could have been caught in. Just last week two boys their age in Texas got thirteen months in state prison for homosexual conduct. It's legal in Indiana, but that still doesn't make it accepted. There are a thousand ways they could both be under arrest right now.

“Go home Mr. Talbot,” Hopper says as he opens the door and pulls

Steve out by his shirt sleeve.

Daniel says again, “Yes sir, thank you sir.”

Hopper looks at Steve and tells him to get in the front seat of the police car and he’ll drive Steve home.

When they get in the car together, Steve lights a cigarette and holds out the carton for Hop to take one. He sighs and says, “You’re not supposed to have cigarettes until you’re eighteen.” He takes one anyways; Steve lights it for him.

“So ticket me.” Steve takes a long drag.

Hopper lets that one go with a sigh and starts driving towards the Harrington house. They ride together in silence. Steve’s lips are still swollen from kissing.

He parks out front. Steve doesn’t make any move to leave. He finishes his cigarette and starts another immediately.

“Are you gonna tell my parents?” Steve’s voice is small and shaky. He takes another drag of his cigarette.

Jim rests his hand on Steve’s shoulder. “No kid, I’m not going to tell your parents. I won’t tell anyone. Just ... be more careful next time.”

Steve nods, once. “Alright.” He puts out his cigarette in Hopper’s ash tray and gets out.

He takes a few steps towards the house before turning suddenly and knocking on the window. Hopper leans over and rolls it down for him. Steve smiles, distorting his bruises and pulling at the stiches along his jawline. “Thanks Hopper.” Jim gives him a small salute and drives away as Steve gets inside his house.

5.

They bike to Loch Nora. Steve’s supposed to take them to the movies today, and he promised to pay, but he didn’t show at the arcade on time. It was Mike’s idea. “He probably forgot he was supposed to be picking us up,” he said.

Jane and Will are at some family thing—Joyce and the Chief finally got their shit together and started dating so it's just Lucas, Max, Mike and Dustin.

Dustin knows which rock the Harringtons hide their spare key under and he knows that Steve's parents are out of town so they let themselves inside. Dustin shouts through the big house, "Steve? Are you home?" His words echo throughout the house and a minute later Steve sneaks downstairs. He's just in his boxers, which was striped white and blue.

"Shit, I lost track of time. Just give me a few minutes okay?"

"Hey asshole," Max says as she chomps on an apple she helped herself to from fruit bowl in the kitchen. "You were supposed to be driving us to the movies."

Steve comes down a few more steps. "I know that dipshit; I'll be ready in a sec." He seems shifty and Dustin realizes that he might have a girl upstairs. It's been a few months since his breakup with Nancy, and Dustin didn't realize that Steve was dating—screwing around? hooking up? whatever—again. Dustin feels kind of proud of him, in a weird way, for getting back out there.

Of course, he is still Steve Harrington and despite being off the market for a while, tons of girls would still fall over themselves to be with him. For all Dustin knows, Steve has five girls upstairs. Maybe it was a bad idea coming over. It's one thing to know Steve sleeps around in theory, but to see a girl walking around (half-dressed, if Steve is anything to go by) would be kind of weird.

Dustin is just about to say, "Maybe we should wait by the pool?" when a man starts coming downstairs, half-dressed same as Steve. He isn't paying them any attention, just kisses Steve's cheek and starts saying something about borrowing Steve's sweatshirt. Steve pushes him away and jerks his head towards the party. The other guys says, "Oh shit" and runs back up the stairs when he sees the group.

Oh shit.

Oh shit.

Oh shit.

Steve had a guy upstairs. A really good looking guy, with a six pack and long surfer hair. Definitely not the blonde bombshell Dustin was picturing.

“Living room,” Steve says through gritted teeth. “Now.” The groups shuffles into the living room and eavesdrops as the other guy comes back downstairs a few minutes later fully dressed and says goodbye to Steve.

“Sorry again,” he says.

Steve huffs. “Whatever man, just get out.” He slams the door a second later and party jumps at the noise.

Steve is fully dressed when he comes in the living room, looking every bit as cool as usual. He pinches the bridge of his nose when he sees them all staring at him and says, “What. The fuck. Are you dipshits doing here?”

Mike looks at his feet and says, “You were supposed to pick us up at the arcade, but you were late and so we thought you forgot that we weren’t meeting here so we decided to bike over and Dustin knows where the key was and Lucas said we should let ourselves in—“

“Don’t blame me, dude!”

“I did not say that; Max did!”

“No I didn’t!”

“Shut up!” Steve shouts.

Steve tells them to get in his car and stop talking so they all pile in as he starts driving them to the nice theater two towns over.

It’s silent in the car, and Dustin can feel all his muscles tenses. Steve is gripping the wheel really hard; Dustin can see the whites of his knuckles.

Steve sighs as they come to stop at a red light. He pulls out a

cigarette and rolls the window down before telling all of them, “Don’t smoke, okay? Don’t hang out with people who smoke.” He lights his cigarette and takes a drag, blowing the smoke out the open window. The light turns green and he starts driving again.

He says *shit* under his breath before saying, “Does anyone. Fuck. Does anyone have any—shit—questions?”

It’s quiet for a second. Max asks, “Why didn’t you tell us you were gay?”

“Hey dipshit” Steve waves his cigarette at her as he talks. “I’m not fucking queer, okay? Jesus. No more questions.” They ride together in silence, watch the movie together in silence and drive home together in silence. Steve locks them in the car he pulls back up to his house and says, “Don’t tell anyone, okay?” They all nod, Steve unlocks the car and they never talk about it again.

(Dustin brings it up to Steve about a month later, when it’s just the two of them. Steve talks to him about it—how he’s known for a long time, how big of a secret it is. They laugh together at Steve’s story about Hopper catching him parked somewhere. Dustin pats his arm awkwardly at the end of their talk and tells Steve that it doesn’t matter, that he’s still the best babysitter around.)

+ 1

Steve somehow gets corralled into babysitting Will. He doesn’t know how the hell it happens. Joyce and Jonathan are away touring NYU; Jane and Hopper are meeting with some doctor and Joyce wouldn’t let Will be alone for the night. But it’s fine. Hopper gonna pay him a few bucks, which will be nice because since he’s graduated he’s mostly just lounged around his parents’ house and done nothing work-wise.

Will is a cool kid and easy to watch, unlike Dustin who’s always trying to get him to play Dungeons & Dragons or Max who just wants to ditch him to go skating. They’re all getting a little too old to be babysat (okay definitely too old; at their age he was staying by himself for a week or two at a time) but he likes hanging out with the little shits and they mostly like him too so it works out.

It's an easy evening. They watch Terminator together and making fun of the accent back and forth. Will has plans to meet up at Mike's for Dungeons & Dragons in a few hours so they're mostly just killing time.

Steve makes them dinner—just TV trays that Hopper had left out—and they eat together in silence. The kid is shifting around in his chair like he's sitting on something so Steve finally says, "What?"

"Um—it's just—nothing—never mind"

"Oh c'mon kid, out with it," Steve says and pokes him with his fork.

"IthinkImightbegay." Will speaks so fast that Steve can't catch it.

"Stop. Slow down." Steve shakes Will's shoulder a bit, a big brother move that he uses on Dustin sometimes and always makes him feel good. "Repeat."

"Um—like, I think—um—I think I might be—um—gay? " Will is looking at the table, refusing to catch Steve's eyes.

Fuck. He's heard rumors—of course, everyone has—of Will being queer, but he never thought they had any leg to stand on.

"Okay," Steve says. "That's okay. Um—your mom and Jonathan will still love you or whatever." He knows this is true, just like he knows that if his parents ever found out about his little *escapades* they'd throw him out on his ass.

He takes a risk. The entire party—Jesus God he was using their lingo—knew anyway, except him and Jane, who Steve doubts would ever care. "I'm um, not gay, but something close."

Will looks up. "You're bullshitting me. *King Steve* is not gay."

Steve laughs. It's been a while since anyone referred to him as King Steve. "I know that. I just said I wasn't gay." They laugh. Well, Steve laughs and Will is desperate to keep things not awkward so he laughs too. "I like girls too. But I've been known to play for the other team."

"*Here?* In Hawkins?" Will sounds scandalized, as if no one is Hawkins

has ever been gay.

Steve laughs. “Yes, even here, in Hawkins. Hopper caught me parked once.”

Will looks dumbstruck. They sit together for a while longer and chat. Steve tells him that he started experimenting when he was fourteen—“Which was way too young, don’t do anything until you’re thirty”—and things kind of spiraled from there. He’s been caught a few times, including by all of Will’s friends, who were cool with it as far as Steve knew. It’s taken him a while but he’s okay with who he is, even if it means he has to keep some stuff secret.

“We keep everything else secret so this one is easy.” He winks at Will, which makes him laugh. Steve feels so cool then, making Will laugh and keeping him from not being scared.

Will has and asks a thousand questions, which Steve answers as best he can. Will doesn’t stop until they get to Mike’s. Steve walks him to the door, since everyone is still a little protective of him. Will hugs him, quick, before shooing him away as Mrs. Wheeler opens the door. Steve ruffles Will’s hair as he goes inside. Will shoots him a smile before closing the door.